

Beowulf

XXXIII

THEN the baleful fiend its fire belched out,
and bright homes burned. The blaze stood high
all landsfolk frightening. No living thing
would that loathly one leave as aloft it flew.
Wide was the dragon's warring seen,
its fiendish fury far and near,
as the grim destroyer those Geatish people
hated and hounded. To hidden lair,
to its hoard it hastened at hint of dawn.
Folk of the land it had lapped in flame,
with bale and brand. In its barrow it trusted,
its battling and bulwarks: that boast was vain!

To Beowulf then the bale was told
quickly and truly: the king's own home,
of buildings the best, in brand-waves melted,
that gift-throne of Geats. To the good old man
sad in heart, 'twas heaviest sorrow.
The sage assumed that his sovran God
he had angered, breaking ancient law,
and embittered the Lord. His breast within
with black thoughts welled, as his wont was never.
The folk's own fastness that fiery dragon
with flame had destroyed, and the stronghold all
washed by waves; but the warlike king,
prince of the Weders, plotted vengeance.
Warriors'-bulwark, he bade them work
all of iron -- the earl's commander --
a war-shield wondrous: well he knew
that forest-wood against fire were worthless,
linden could aid not. -- Atheling brave,
he was fated to finish this fleeting life, [footnote 1]
his days on earth, and the dragon with him,
though long it had watched o'er the wealth of the hoard! --
Shame he reckoned it, sharer-of-rings,
to follow the flyer-afar with a host,
a broad-flung band; nor the battle feared he,
nor deemed he dreadful the dragon's warring,
its vigor and valor: ventures desperate
he had passed a-plenty, and perils of war,
contest-crash, since, conqueror proud,
Hrothgar's hall he had wholly purged,
and in grapple had killed the kin of Grendel,

loathsome breed! Not least was that
 of hand-to-hand fights where Hygelac fell,
 when the ruler of Geats in rush of battle,
 lord of his folk, in the Frisian land,
 son of Hrethel, by sword-draughts died,
 by brands down-beaten. Thence Beowulf fled
 through strength of himself and his swimming power,
 though alone, and his arms were laden with thirty
 coats of mail, when he came to the sea!
 Nor yet might Hetwaras [footnote 2] haughtily boast
 their craft of contest, who carried against him
 shields to the fight: but few escaped
 from strife with the hero to seek their homes!
 Then swam over ocean Ecgtheow's son
 lonely and sorrowful, seeking his land,
 where Hygd made him offer of hoard and realm,
 rings and royal-seat, reckoning naught
 the strength of her son to save their kingdom
 from hostile hordes, after Hygelac's death.
 No sooner for this could the stricken ones
 in any wise move that atheling's mind
 over young Heardred's head as lord
 and ruler of all the realm to be:
 yet the hero upheld him with helpful words,
 aided in honor, till, older grown,
 he wielded the Weder-Geats. -- Wandering exiles
 sought him o'er seas, the sons of Ohtere,
 who had spurned the sway of the Scylfings'-helmet,
 the bravest and best that broke the rings,
 in Swedish land, of the sea-kings' line,
 haughty hero. [footnote 3] Hence Heardred's end.
 For shelter he gave them, sword-death came,
 the blade's fell blow, to bairn of Hygelac;
 but the son of Ongentheow sought again
 house and home when Heardred fell,
 leaving Beowulf lord of Geats
 and gift-seat's master. -- A good king he!

Footnotes.

1.

Literally "loan-days," days loaned to man.

2.

Chattuarii, a tribe that dwelt along the Rhine, and took part in repelling the raid of (Hygelac) Chocilaicus.

3.

Onela, son of Ongentheow, who pursues his two nephews Eanmund and Eadgils to

Heardred's court, where they have taken refuge after their un- successful rebellion. In the fighting Heardred is killed.